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**SHORTGRASS COUNTRY by Monte Noelke**

Except for the Eskimos gathering reindeer, the closest sight of an agriculture project on a trip to Alaska in mid-summer was an abandoned dairy barn. One coach driver said he thought moose should be domesticated. To interject a history lesson in ranching on the deserts of Texas was a big temptaion, but perhaps his wife was a school teacher and he'd planned on keeping on driving a bus to support the moose herd.

At Fairbanks a scientist working for the Arctic Biology Department of the University of Alaska brought up the subject of cattle by showing us the college's experimental herd of muskoxen. Right casual like, she said, "For a year, I milked an oxen twice a day. The milk was too rich to drink, but made the best of ice cream, and the wool underneath the hair was finer than cashmere."

Muskoxen were reintroduced in Alaska from Greenland in 1934. Calves come off 500-pound dams in nine months at 150 pounds, or can stay on their mothers twice the time, causing her to miss rebreeding. A professional hair stylist might be able to tell whether a calf was nursing up underneath the big overhang hair. Otherwise, a dry cow would be hard to cut out.

Bulls, under study, resemble range cattle. "Out of 1300 advances to six cows, a muskoxen bull mates five times," lady told us. Watching a couple of bulls fighting over the cyclone fence, the figure is probably conservative. Black bulls on Shortgrass ranges bellow and paw a lot but are mighty shy about breeding a cow. Not even the county agents have time to wait around to count the ratio of advances to settlement.

Before the present era of muskoxen, Eskimos used the hair to make mosquito netting. The big problem with the craft was that once a mosquito slipped under the netting, the tensile strength of fiber was too strong for the insect or the man to avoid a fight.

The inventor of the breakaway football jersey was a defensive player who had learned his lessons. No mention is made in Jack London's old stories of the Arctic of taming wild mosquitoes; yet for certain, the big-winged black monsters won his respect.

Citizens up there seemed to be more withdrawn than those in other parts of the U.S. I suspect the reason is because all adults have the right to perform one legal marriage in their lifetime. Such a grave responsibility must be like a president wondering whether he'll ever have to punch those fateful buttons on his desk.